This dictionary was written with the assistance of

Pierre Alexandre
Hélène Balfet
Genevieve Calame-Griaule
Georges Condominas
Jacqueline Delange
Ariane Deluze
Marguerite Dupire
Igor de Garine
Jean Herniaux
Pierre Ichac
Jean-Paul Lebeuf
Michel Leiris
Raymond Mauny
Paul Mercier
Henri Moniot
Denise Paulme
André Schaeffner
Claude Tardits

Dictionary of Black African Civilization

Georges Balandier
Jacques Maquet

Leon Amiel · Publisher, New York

DT 916.7
352.4 B18dEn
.D5213 Cop 3
1974
Cop. 2

Africa
705

Copyright © 1974 by Leon Amiel · Publisher, New York.

Picture research and captions by **Nathalie Noël.**

Translated from the French by **Lady (Mariska Caroline) Peck, Bettina Wadia** and **Peninah Neimark.**

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY GANIS AND HARRIS, NEW YORK

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:

Dictionary of Black African civilization.

Translation of Dictionnaire des civilisations africaines.
I. Africa, Sub-Saharan—Civilization—Dictionaries.
I. Balandier, Georges II. Maquet, Jacques Jérome Pierre, 1919-
DT352.4.D5213 916.7'03'03 72-85389
ISBN 0-8148-0480-2

Translator's Note

In preparing this translation, we have attempted to update the original, 1968 French edition of *Dictionaire des Civilisations Africaines* on a limited basis. Names of independent nations have been changed, where necessary, to conform to current usage, and in several instances we have updated articles to reflect current events and new archeological data. However, none of the tribal population or agricultural production figures have been revised.

For the translation of the names of tribes and ethnic groups, we have generally followed George Peter Murdock's *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959). For the names of Bantu tribes, however, we have conformed to the common American and British practice of using the Bantu personal plural prefix *Ba*; e.g., "Baluba" rather than "Luba."

On behalf of my co-translators, Lady (Mariska C.) Peck and the late Bettina Wadia, I want to thank William Fagg C.M.G. for the assistance he gave them in the course of the translation of various portions of the book. I also want to thank Glorya Cohen, who proofread the galleys, for her numerous helpful comments, Jerry Burstein for his handsome layout of the English edition and Roy Jensen for his careful handling of all aspects of the production of this book.

PENINAH NEIMARK

Preface

The continent of Africa is no longer on the fringe of the known world; a trip there is no longer a voyage into the dark unknown. Its peoples and their cultural wealth were separated from the course of history for too long, and now they have been summoned to rejoin it. Its civilizations are changing and are becoming creative once again; with a new found strength they are stimulating the soul and the mind of Africa. Its peoples are struggling to become a part of the modern world without losing the values and ways that are an integral part of that soul and mind. This rebirth has made Africa topical and has piqued our curiosity. Today, Africa is more misunderstood than it is exotic.

This book is an attempt by French Africanists to dissipate that misunderstanding. It is an epitome of the knowledge scattered throughout the rapidly accumulating quantity of works on Africa. In addition, it is a synthesis of the authors' experiences with the peoples of Africa, for their experience is not purely academic; they are also fieldworkers.

It covers the civilizations and black African societies in all their variety and individuality, but it does not offer a complete list of tribes and ethnic groups; this would have turned the dictionary into an unenlightening inventory. We have had to select the outstanding and most representative of the great cultural regions, but at the same time we have tried to give an idea of their variety in a number of articles on individual tribes in addition to discussions of general subjects. This will decrease, if not eliminate, the risk of sinning by omission. In the overall picture of black Africa, a profound affinity unites the many in the one; in the "dissemblances" are many resemblances.

The dictionary form has the advantage of helping the reader to find a term or a subject or it may simply stimulate his interest. Discovery and unexpected meaningful encounter may be his as he browses through its pages: *Taboos,* for example, is juxtaposed with *Theater, Sacrifice* with *Sahara.* There is an intellectual challenge

in its apparent incongruity. The reader who has time can build up a more thorough body of information by systematically following the cross-references from one subject to another.

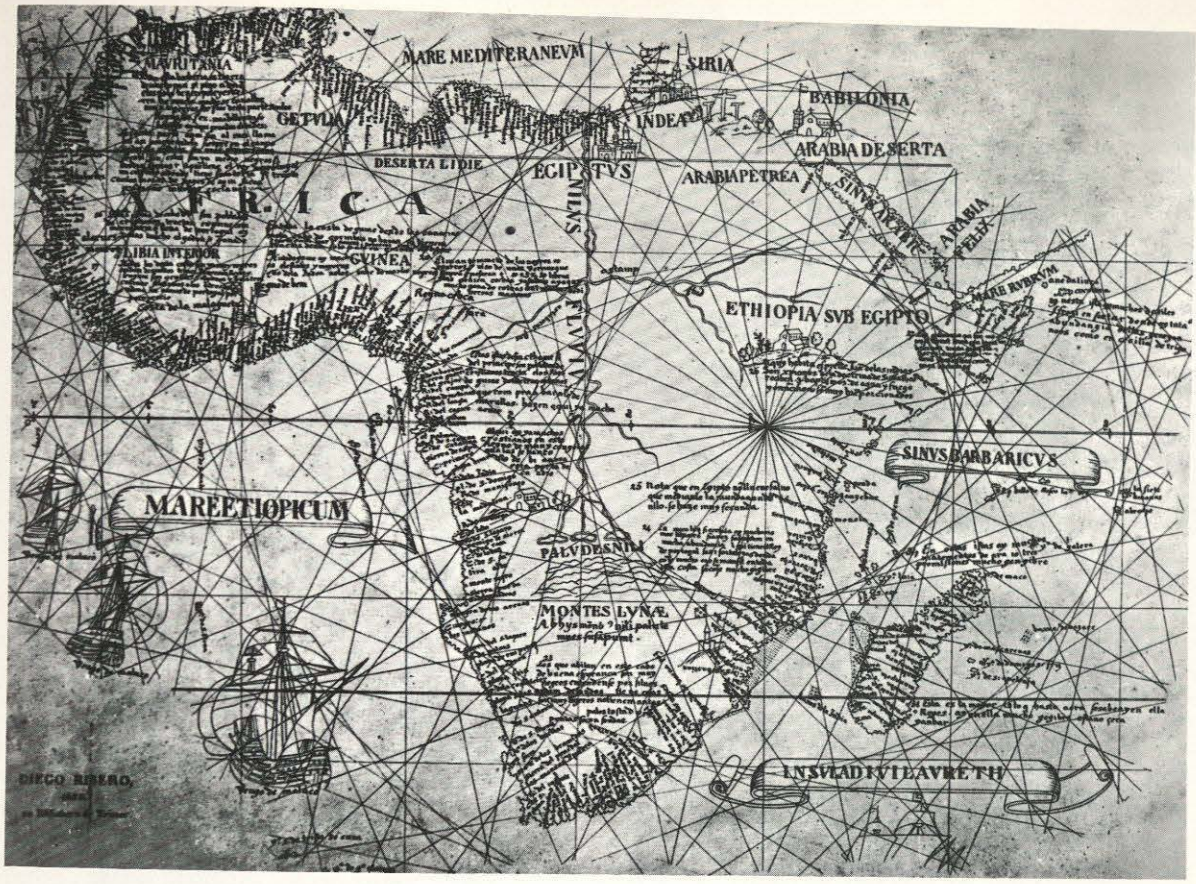
The *Dictionary of Black African Civilization* satisfies this curiosity through the principles that have guided the choice of articles. The main outlines of African geography are described in it as well as the basic features that give a unique character to its landscape. The landmarks of its history have been plotted to remind us of a fact that has been neglected for too long: the roots of African history have penetrated deep down through the centuries, with a complexity of human endeavor and vicissitude equal to that of the histories which are familiar to us. The principal purpose of this book is to focus attention on the creative life and history of Africa as displayed in its culture, techniques and extraordinarily varied social relationships. The arts, liberally illustrated by photographs of products from the artistic centers, are a reminder of the rich contribution made by the black African to the museums of our cities and our minds. Accounts of traditional oral literature help to give a more exact idea of the African mind, which is also reflected in its cultural diversity, ranging from craft techniques to physical postures and significant movements, myths and ritual practices. This kaleidoscope of everyday life is set in the framework of several articles on social and political structures.

The African himself has not been lost in the alphabetical classification of the dictionary form. He is everywhere present, as much in his symbolic activities as in his work and in his games, as much in his links with tradition as in his march toward the future. Thus, this book is a modest encyclopedia of the black African world and a contribution toward the building of a fuller humanism for today.

GEORGES BALANDIER
JACQUES MAQUET

NOTE: The articles are signed with the initials of their authors.

Dictionary of Black African Civilization



Map of Africa by Diego Ribero (1529) *Photo: Viollet, Roger.*

ADORNMENT. In Africa, as in Oceania and Indonesia, it is the men who wear the brightest and most splendid adornments. During the dance that culminates the great festival which brings together the scattered tribes of the Fulani Bororo of the Niger River region, the young men, covered with jewelry and makeup, appear smiling before the girls, who have to choose the most handsome among them; the dance itself bears some resemblance to the rivalry between the males of a herd in the rutting season. Among the Koniagi of Guinea, only the young men have the privilege of wearing huge crests on their heads, like those of gallinaceous birds, which are symbols of power and beauty.

In several societies, adornments and body markings are arranged in an actual system of signs that almost constitutes a language. Like all languages, it has no meaning outside the framework of fixed and generally accepted conventions. Ornaments are rarely without social significance, which prescribes their use by some and prohibits it to others. In most African societies, a little girl, a marriageable young girl, a young mother, a woman who has lost a child and a widow are distinguished by different hairstyles and are not entitled to the same ornaments. A single plait across her head is all that a little Bambara girl keeps of her hair, and, when she is older, it will be arranged into two plaits on either side of her head. The Kikuyu woman of East Africa shows that she is married by shaving her entire head except for a tuft of hair on the nape. In other parts of Africa, a married woman keeps only an oval patch of hair, which is carefully marked out above her forehead. When her first child is born, a Herero woman of South-West Africa wears a diadem of iron beads mounted on leather. As soon as a Diola woman of Portuguese Guinea realizes that she is pregnant, she exchanges her belt of glass beads for a girdle decorated with grass and fruit. Widows are considered impure everywhere and forced into retirement; their heads are shaved, and they have to dress in a special way during the period of their widowhood.

Adornment tends more to sharpen the differences between the sexes than to efface them; the loincloth, for instance, seems designed to attract attention to the part of the body that it covers. Another motive affecting the choice of adornment is the desire to